

POISONOUS HONEY IN 1802

In 1802, Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton, one of the leading American botanists of that period, was the author of a paper on "Some account of the poisonous and injurious honey of North America." This was published in the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (Vol. 5, No. 7, p. 51-70, 1802). This poisonous honey, supposedly due to the nectar of poisonous flowers which the bees had visited, produced, when eaten by humans, vertigo or dimness of vision at first and then a delirium that was sometimes mild and pleasant and sometimes "ferocious." This was followed by stomach and intestinal pains, profuse perspiration, foaming at the mouth, purging, and in some cases death. Barton, in his paper also mentioned that bees feeding in the flowers, *Kalmia angustifolia*, produced a honey that was intoxicating. Although he did not so state, I am of the opinion that this honey had been allowed to ferment.

Although primarily a botanist Barton wrote a few papers on insects. For one of these entitled, "Memoir on a Number of Pernicious Insects of the United States" and which appeared in the Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal, (Vol. 1, pt. 2, Art. 20, p. 127-31, 1805) he was honored with the Magellanic Medal of the American Philosophical Society. When only twenty-four he was appointed to the chair of natural history and botany in the College of Philadelphia and thus became the first natural history instructor in Philadelphia.—H. B. W.